

Degree of maturity: On
the road to nowhere?
Working-class graduates

My background

- Child of 80s living on one of the worst council housing estates in Liverpool.
- Liverpool of the 80s: high levels of unemployment, urban decline, poverty, high levels of crime and as such it was bordering towards a Thatcher plan of managed decline.
- Education started in 1989-1992 (7 GCSEs and 3 A levels)
- 1995 BA combined Hons degree Psychology & Sociology
- 1998 MA Social Policy & Social Work
- 1999 Msc Applied Psychology
- 2001 Postgraduate certificate Clinical and Forensic psychology
- 2018-PhD Criminology
- 2019 FHEA
- 20 Publications to date (both academic and media), monograph “Understanding street gangs and beyond” Palgrave (Aug 2020)
- Professional development training that includes 20 diplomas & certificates in various topics including Postgraduate Diploma in Offender Profiling and Crime Scene Analysis.

Demographic: Knowsley

- “Today, Knowsley is at the top and the bottom of every British economic and social league table you would be anxious to avoid” (Guardian, Jan 2017).
- BREXIT: During the referendum over remaining in the EU, Knowsley most residents revealed themselves to be very keen to leave the EU.
- First British local authority to stop offering A-levels.
- No support in the borough for returning graduates (you have the skills you don't need help! But what you do need is decent opportunities).
- Local council moans there no role models (yet do nothing to support pockets of graduates).
- “job coaches” graduate goals are unrealistic in this area and that more time must be spent looking for “survival jobs” in such as places as call centers for retail outlets such as Asda, Tesco's and Argos.

Cantril Farm/Stockbridge Village



Why not leave?

- The vicious funding circle: In order to leave somewhere you need finances, in order to get finances you need income from employment.
- Basic economics: Identify and more affluent area? The few areas where there are high levels of proper GRADUATE employment opportunities. If you find one, they will have a higher cost of living which will add further to initial relocation and long-term living costs.
- Why should people have to relocate their life and roots because of government failure to create better social mobility?

What of socially excluded working-class graduates and postgraduates leaving university today

- Reference requests from both Bachelors and MA graduates at first class, distinction and merit levels: for Moss Bros tailors (retail assistant), Bet Fred and Boots cashiers.
- A simple online search can reveal the truth that many graduates returning to social exclusion simply end up at the door of Job Centre Plus or in work they could have done without the debt of a university degree or two.
- This in turn, leads to questions like are such institutions simply out of touch? Or in light of the prospect of filling a £9.000 + per year is it a case of turning the metaphorical blind eye? And of course, the ultimate question ... is it worth it?

Some stats

- Statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA, 2015) revealed that over 60,000 university leavers were in “non-professional” jobs that could have been obtained without a degree. Further, six months after leaving university, a third of graduates who actually found employment had taken jobs such as cleaners and road sweepers.

What of working-class postgraduates with academic teaching and research aspirations in Higher Education (HE)

- First and foremost you need to have a PhD!
- PhDs cost money ... a lot of money! In the UK, its pay yourself, find some form of sponsorship or apply to one of the research councils (ESRC). Hence, academia still dominated by the middle-classes.
- Secondly, for the majority of full-time teaching and research contracts at a university, research publications are must (publish or perish). Not only that, but such publications should ideally be recognised by the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
- Thirdly, In some universities it now a case of looking at who a candidate is publishing with and the quality of the publishing houses.
- Fourthly, internal candidates.

Idea



- Could Further Education teaching provide an alternative route for working-class academics into HE? A possible HE teaching apprenticeship?

Summary

- There are a lot of issues within this “is it worth it?” debate but summarising this into a general context, marginalised graduates have become the epitome of what it is like to be a victim of exclusion within exclusion.
- In the meantime, we have government ministers and local councilors who continue to moan about the lack of role models in excluded communities as an excuse for high rates of crime and deprivation, while at the same time ignoring the very individuals who could help kick start deprived areas ... The end result? Marginalised graduates left to waste away starved of support, their motivation fading forever to remain in communities such as Knowsley on the road to nowhere.

Questions

